New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1956

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 8, 1956*

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Harbor Lights"

Daily Mirror

October 5, 1956

Robert Coleman's **THEATRE:**

'Harbor Lights' Fails To Burn Brightly

• Norman Vane's offering proves earnestness can be a bore.

Norman Vane's "Harbor Lights" blinked on the stage of the Playhouse for the first time here Thursday evening. We regret to report that they will probably blink off all too soon. For the new arrival proves that earnestness can be a bore.

It's not that "Harbor Lights" is really bad, but rather that it's just not good enough to survive the rigorous competition on the Main Stem. It seldom touches the heart, or churns the emotions, and it should. For the idea is highly dramatic, and honestly intended to be tender in a rough sort of way.

VANE IS DEALING with a boozy braggart who insists upon his rights to visit a teen-age son by a wife who obtained a divorce and remarried a clean-cut, ambitious garage mechanic. The stepfather wants the youngster to lead a normal, sensible life. To realize a decent manhood.

But the real father's sporadic visits destroy his plans. The bibulous bucko tells glamorous tales of the sea and the ports he has visited. He becomes a hero in his son's eyes, making the kid want to seek adventure in far places alongside his dad. Then the truth comes out.

The intruder has beat up a ship's mate, lost his officer's papers and been reduced to drudgery on a third-rate tugboat. The boy's dreams are shattered. His disillusionment is complete. But from it, it is obvious that a happy and sound relationship will be established in his home.

ANTHONY PARELLA has given "Harbor Lights" an excellent production. Perry Watkins has designed a ramshackle old house on the Staten Island shore. It is fronted by a houseboat built by the boy from the flotsam and jetsam brought in by his erratic dad. You can fairly smell salt air and hear the whistles of tramps and liners bound for the reaches of the world.

Parella has signed a first-rate cast. Film star Linda Darnell, making her Broadway bow, etches the harassed wife with un-showy but often moving effect. Robert Alda, the slick and likeable Sky Masterson of "Guys and Dolls," has the bravura part of the swaggering seaman bent on getting his dues, and acts it to the hilt.

Paul Langton, as the tormented step-father, is eminently right in a difficult role. Peter Votrian proves himself a poised young player as the disturbed son. And Pat Harrington, from the niteries, is quite wonderful as an aging Irish seaman with a sexy gleam left in his eyes.

"HARBOR LIGHTS"

Play by Norman Vane; staged by Thomajan; settings by Perry Watkins; lighting by Lee Watson; Linda Darnell's gown by Jeanne Partington; presented by Anthony Parella at the Playhouse Theatre, October 4, 1956. The cast:

Gene.....Peter Votrian
Marion.....Linda Darnell
Roy.....Paul Langton
Chris.....Robert Alda
Jake.....Pat Harrington
Willy.....Ronn Cummins
Mike.....Darryl Richard
Dolly.....Joan Mann Carter
Margery.....Albie Gaye

New York Herald Tribune

October 5, 1956

THEATER

'Harbor Lights'

By WALTER KERR

THE seagoing folk at the Playhouse have quite a habit of staring out over the audience, hallooing, and calling "What's it like out there?"

Inexplicably, no answer ever came from the auditorium Thursday night. But I can tell them now. It was grisly, men, grisly.

• • •

As a matter of actual fact, things were all right until the first word was spoken. A small boy was seen clambering over what looked like a skeleton wheel-house on Staten Island —no, I *don't* know what a skeleton wheel-house was doing on Staten Island—and lighting up green and red lanterns high in the air. Then he turned to the sea, cupped his hands, and shouted "Hello, you old great hunk of a ship, you!"

After that it was poetry, poetry, poetry. The boy's father, no longer married to his mother, strolled on in a peaked cap and with "salt in his mouth," mentioned he had just come from "out there where it's clean and free," slopped a can of beer all over the front of mother Linda Darnell's dress, and began whispering to the lad about "the bloom on the ocean" and "all the sparkly stars" and how the deep "keeps callin' me—Come on! Come on!" (He doesn't go for quite a long while).

• • •

"Stop bringing him dreams!" cries Linda Darnell, stamping her pretty foot. Linda Darnell, if you want to go on with the plot, is mightily desired by two men, the minor-league John Masefield who has just come home and the more reliable landlubber (he likes to sift "this earth" through his fingers and plant geraniums) to whom she is currently wed. Both men are unhappy. "Last night," sobs the landlubber, "I held you in my arms, I held you and I kissed you, and you said over and over again in my arms 'Chris . . . Chris'" (Yes, Chris is the other guy.) Chris, ruggedly impersonated by Robert Alda, has reasons of his own for sobbing in the moonlight. He remembers. "I know how her lips feel. I know how she kisses in the morning when she's half full of sleep," he says.

• • •

Well, between the lips and the arms and the moon and the sparkly stars, things get to such a pitch that everybody has to hold onto everybody else. Hubby No. 2 grabs Linda Darnell by the wrists, and she has to wrench herself free. Hubby No. 1 grabs Linda Darnell by the wrists, and she has to wrench herself free, breathing harder. Now Linda grabs No. 2 by the shoulders while No. 1 grabs the boy by the shoulders and they all shout at each other until they are ready to change partners, with the boy finally clutching at Robert Alda's leg and No. 2 getting rid of his pent-up passions by wringing the neck of a perfectly innocent live duck.

• • •

Through all of this the handsome, sultry, substantial Miss Darnell steps delicately around a backyard that seems to have been designed to trip her up. I have only one serious criticism to make of her performance: she doesn't know how to fold an ironing board. She sort of bends one leg in, hesitates, and then slips it into the wings where the stage manager can take care of it later. This isn't working in depth, Linda. Robert Alda, as the seaman who was caught crying on deck one night and explained to the first mate "It's the wind, sir, the wind in my face," was much better off when he was in musical comedy, where the lyrics are better.

New York Post

October 5, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Symbolic Drama of a Tame Duck

Staten Island passions were torn to tatters at the Playhouse last night. Strong men (on the stage) were sobbing as the curtain descended. Prose poetry rent the air. Symbolism was rife. Tugboats could occasionally be heard in the distance. Music emerged mysteriously when a lyric scoundrel of a seafaring man tried to seduce his ex-wife. Pat Harrington wandered about complaining that he hadn't had a girl for two years. A duck was killed offstage. It was dreadful.

The cause of it all was a play by Norman Vane called "Harbor Lights," which was having its reckless Broadway premiere. Heavy with the clash of its symbols, it told about a swaggering but melancholy vagabond who hadn't really been to those exotic lands he talked of so glowingly, and the son who idolized him, and the ex-wife he had deserted, and the worthy Staten Islander who had married her and was striving with wistful lack of success to win the love of her son. It was also about that duck.

Ibsen Touch

Since "Harbor Lights" is not only incredibly inept and a bore but is also a play filled with worthy purposes, I kept wondering what the author thought he was up to, and I believe the duck may have supplied me with a clue. My theory is that Mr. Vane, hearing that there are critics who regard Ibsen as outmoded, decided to bring the old gentleman up to date by modernizing his symbolism a bit. Since Ibsen had written a play about a wild duck, he gave us a drama about a tame one.

Anyway, the seafaring man, who really isn't a seafaring man but a hand on a New York tugboat, steals a duck and gives it to his neglected but worshipful son as a present. It's that boy, a surly though pathetic young fellow, who first suggests that the gift is a symbol. To let you in on the secret, the duck tries to fly away with some wild birds but can't make it, which, I guess, is symbolic of the son's fate. At least, it's enough to cause the second husband to kill the poor creature.

O'Neill Touch

It appears that the author, not completely satisfied by his touch of Ibsen, has added a hint of the early O'Neill, too. That awful boy is likewise to blame for this. He has a shack fixed to represent a ship, and he has hung up two ship's lights on the roof. When, at the end of the play, he sadly puts out the lamps and takes them down, you know he has come to realize that his father has failed him. One thing I couldn't understand was why everyone wanted to win the child's favor.

If the acting doesn't seem a great deal better than the play, it may be because the performers have been supplied with an insurmountable obstacle. Robert Alda is the vagabond, Linda Darnell the wife, Paul Langton the second husband, and Peter Votrian the boy, and they are hardly to be blamed for their defeats. I thought only Mr. Harrigan, as the woebegone sailor gloomy over his womanless state, gave life to what he was doing. There is at least something wistful about poor "Harbor Lights."

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 5, 1956

Any Old Plot In a Storm

By TOM DONNELLY.

"Harbor Lights" (at the Playhouse) is a grim study of unrest among the natives of Staten Island.

I am always willing and eager to learn about small and little-known ethnic groups, but frankly, Playwright Norman Vane is no Margaret Mead. One does not have to hold a doctorate in anthropology to perceive that Mr. Vane hasn't the faintest idea of what makes people tick.

The heroine of "Harbor Lights" is a woman named Marion, and her trouble is that she is being pulled in three different directions, simultaneously.

Husbands 1 and 2.

Her current husband is a garage mechanic, sober and industrious, and her ex-husband is a sailor, given to alcohol, profane language, and indelicate suggestions. The sailor is the father of Marion's son, a remarkably unwinning juvenile named Gene. Marion tries to do her best by all three, but her best is none too good, since she is a woman given to great emotional confusion and inexpressive monosyllabic utterance.

The ex-husband, who is named Chris, is away on the briny most of the time, but every now and then he turns up to fill Gene's head with stories about exotic climes, and mysterious purple shores, and sunsets that twist a man's heart in his chest.

Rocks in the Head.

The garage mechanic does his best to capture the boy's affections, but since the lad appears to be intermittently deaf, all his efforts are doomed to failure.

This deafness of the boy's is a strange phenomenon. There are lengthy interludes when he makes absolutely no response to anything that is said to him. Mr. Vane may imagine that this is an efficient theatrical way of demonstrating the boy's complete absorption in his salty parent, but I couldn't help feeling that the truest thing in the play is said by a Staten Island urchin who accuses Gene of having rocks in his head.

At last, driven to mindless despair, the garage mechanic throttles Gene's pet duck, which was a gift from his father.

Knew It All the Time.

In the end, which I began to think was never coming, the sailor is unmasked as a complete fraud. He hasn't been sailing the China Coast all those years. He has been serving as first mate on a tugboat, drearily cruising the sea lanes adjacent to Staten Island.

Apart from some interesting passages on Staten Island mating customs (It is established that the sailor gave Marion her first drink, her first kiss, and her first black eye), Mr. Vane must be said to have missed the boat all along the line.

Linda Darnell, who plays Marion, is a fine figure of a woman, but having abundantly established that fact in the movies, she is wasting her time in "Harbor Lights." Her acting is thin and monotonous.

Part by Part.

As the contemptible tar, Robert Alda has been afforded some singularly rich opportunities to dismay and offend, and he has missed none of them.

Paul Langton is the garage mechanic, and I have nothing against him, particularly. I can also find it in my heart to forgive Pat Harrington, who is required to burst into the proceedings from hour to hour with jokes and witty sayings. No soft shoe, however.

Peter Votrian is the boy so oddly esteemed by the contending parties.

The New York Times
October 5, 1956

Theatre: Sad Seaside

'Harbor Lights' Seen at the Playhouse

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THERE is something elusive about "Harbor Lights," which went on at the Playhouse last evening. No, that's not entirely true. Everything about it is elusive.

When the curtain goes up on an ominously cluttered stage, a healthy juvenile actor races up ladders, darts through the scenery and eagerly brushes the dust off a ramp into a new dustpan. He's excited because his old man, a deep-water sailor, is coming home.

Don't get any cheerful thoughts in your head, however. For this youngster is in a jam, and so are all the characters in Norman Vane's heartbroken play. The boy's father and his mother are divorced. He lives with her second husband, a decent automobile mechanic, in Staten Island.

When the mariner turns up, everybody in the play starts tugging at everybody else. Everybody takes turns tugging at the son. When they get nowhere, they tug at one another. They also swear, yell, push, pummel and talk sexy. For Mr. Vane is a self-sustaining dramatist who deals in all the staples of the stage and does not need to go to life for his materials. One good ride on the Staten Island ferry would clear his mind of all the stale clap-trap he has dumped into this maudlin and humorless play.

As the director, Guy Thomajan is the perfect collaborator. He gives every cliché an extra wham in his staging. As the mother, the beautiful Linda Darnell stands with her arms at her sides, depicting constant fury, and goes through each scene with the same distaste for the characters, the story, the symbolism and the scenery. As the mariner, Robert Alda is tall, handsome and romantic. As the stepfather, Paul Langton suffers manfully.

•

Peter Votrian plays the confused son with mechanical alacrity, doing exactly what he has been told. In the part of a bald-headed sailor of advancing years, Pat Harrington plays in a lighter vein, being in that respect an improvement on Mr. Vane, the author.

No doubt, Perry Watkins has followed instructions in designing the scenery. But his setting takes up so much room that there is very little space left for the play. In the circumstances, that is not a disadvantage.

Journal American
October 5, 1956

Dead Duck Symbolizes Its Future

By JOHN McCLAIN

IN "HARBOR LIGHTS," a new drama by Norman Vane which came into the Playhouse Theatre last night, one of the characters becomes so deranged by the quacking of a pet duck that he hustles around the corner and strangles the bird. In so doing he removed one of the best actors and most plausible personalities from the proceedings.

For it is the unhappy fact that the play is a depressing combination of inept though ambitious writing and generally inadequate acting.

With the possible exception of the duck, one is never greatly attracted to the sorry souls onstage, is never impelled to share the anguish of their violent clashes. A vessel depending on the brilliance of "Harbor Lights" to steer her safely to port would be well advised to drop anchor for the night.

Addled Youth

Mr. Vane's drama concerns the plight of a mother and her second husband who fight desperately for the love of her only son.

This rather addled youth showers all his affection on his father, a blustering seafaring man who drops in on the household on his infrequent returns from "far places," each time attempting to rekindle the mother's attraction for him, at the same time winning the lad away from his dreary and respectable stepfather.

It is while the stepfather is in the throes of this frustration that he quite unaccountably strangles the boy's duck. After that I lost interest in the plot.

It is embarrassing to encounter Robert Alda, the superb Sky Masterson of "Guys and Dolls," struggling with this part of a seedy waterfront Lothario.

For one fleeting second he starts to sing a phrase from "Harbor Lights" (the song), and one feels the magic return, but a second later he is fighting back the tears in an insipid encounter with his son, or making a puerile pitch at his ex-wife.

As the mother, Linda Darnell, a more mature Linda to be sure, puts up a game fight but a losing one. To me she appeared bored with her new husband, her son, her ex-husband and Staten Island—she didn't even like the duck very much.

She has been quoted as saying she wants to devote herself to serious drama. "Harbor Lights" hardly qualifies as a fair test, but I'd rather see her back in those undemanding period movies, in color, for her beauty is wonderfully intact.

Paul Langton, cast as the stepfather, has one of the new season's most thankless roles. The kid doesn't really like him much, his wife regards him with polite acceptance, the first husband slugs him, and he is forced to admit he snuffed the duck. He can't win.

One or two bright moments are provided by Pat Harrington, the night club clown here operating as an elderly alcoholic deck-hand. But even he could have given us a better time in a padded cellar with a piano.

Peter Votrian, the boy, seemed capable, although again his part made it difficult, to be sure.

"Harbor Lights" will probably not hold up as the least promising play of the season, but as the second offering to date it at least has the title temporarily in hand.

DAILY NEWS
October 5, 1956

'Harbor Lights' Glows but Dimly As a Serious Quadrangle Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "Harbor Lights," which opened at the Playhouse last evening, there are four people who have much in their hearts and minds but can't express it very well. The author, Norman Vane, seems to be suffering from the same handicap.

He has the ingredients of a drama—two men, a woman and a young boy, each of whom is tugging at the emotions of the other three; but for most of the evening, lacking a playwright's skill for judicious mixing, they remain only ingredients.

So, instead of being an absorbing, perceptive piece of theatrical work, "Harbor Lights" is merely stagey. Linda Darnell and Robert Alda, as two of the mixed-up quartet, cannot get beneath the surface of their roles—because the roles are mostly surface to begin with. Paul Langton plunges a little deeper and manages a few moments of arresting playing. The fourth of the principals, Peter Votrian, is the young boy, and since he actually is a young boy he faces few acting problems; it is only when we grow up that we must learn to dissemble and therefore to act.

The setting of the drama is a waterfront back yard on Staten Island. Miss Darnell has divorced Alda, a seaman, for general misconduct and neglect, has taken custody of their son and has married a steady garage mechanic. The boy has idealized his father into a searfaring hero, and his stepfather can make no headway toward gaining his affections. The showdown finally comes, and at last the boy learns that his daddy is no modern Magellan, but a roustabout laborer on a harbor tug.

Little of this tale stirred me last evening, and I was definitely irritated by the author's propensity for using ugly and obvious expressions relating to sex and cussing when more artful ones would have served better. A hopeful playwright should be taught that mere words cannot shock an audience—even into wakefulness.

In "Harbor Lights" there are a few pleasant but dramatically meaningless moments of character acting by Pat Harrington. The most interesting part of the play, apart from Miss Darnell's indubitable beauty, is Perry Watkins' setting of a ramshackle house and a boy's make-believe houseboat, fronting forlornly on the mists and oil slicks of our great harbor. Last evening I fancied that it was facing toward New Jersey, and I could almost smell the near reaches of the Garden State.

"The Loud Red Patrick"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
October 4, 1956

THEATER

'The Loud Red Patrick'

By WALTER KERR

THE principal business of the new period comedy at the Ambassador—the period is that familiar one of stained-glass windows, gramophones, and telephones that crank on the wall—is something called a "family council." A red-headed father puts his thumbs in his suspenders and meets formally with his four motherless daughters whenever a domestic crisis pops up. In the course of their deliberations the group votes solidly against the practice of keeping live grasshoppers in the kitchen jars, and solidly for the proposal that homeless, wifeless, and jobless David Wayne be admitted to the household.

• • •

This last is a wise decision. For Mr. Wayne has a way with a line. When the line is pretty good—let's say that Mr. Wayne is staring dolefully at a young pup panting to get married and soulfully remarking, "Oh, you stir sad memories in my bosom"—the heart-throb and the horror that go to make up the actor's jaundiced view of women is magnificent to behold. And the house comes down. Furthermore, even when the line isn't very good ("A woman's mind isn't constructed like—well, how shall I say?—well, it isn't constructed") there's still a fish-like sadness in his eyes and a dog-like droop around the corners of his mouth to make the observation seem respectably funny.

Mr. Wayne also has a dapper way with a derby and cane, and when he is light-footing it in the front door, spearing a fellow's straw hat quite unintentionally, or hoisting a fortyish kitchen-maid high in the air for a prance across the parlor, this John Boruff adaptation of a Ruth McKenney novel seems blandly and even gracefully engaging.

• • •

Unhappily, the agile improvisations Mr. Wayne cooks up with such ease are only incidental set-pieces in the featherweight, over-extended, and finally strained family set-to that takes up the evening. One 'democratic' forum around the mahogany table — with father bribing his six-year-old in order to make the vote come out right—is amusing. The second is possible, especially with Mr. Wayne poking his head through the portieres behind to toss in an unwelcome word. But number three is simply the first act all over again, and no amount of doorbell-ringing, balloon-bursting, and pea-shooting from ambush is quite going to convince us we haven't been there before.

As the mutton-chopped patriarch who fancies himself a liberal and likes to think he can shock the help at least once a day, Arthur Kennedy splatters a perfectly good brogue over the premises, toasts his daughters with a rather touching fury, and smirks with splendid contentment as he announces that he is not susceptible to flattery. Mr. Kennedy, however, seems to me to be wantonly miscast: he is one of our very best leading men and this business of an actor's adding years, a paunch, and a pair of striped shirt-sleeves just to show he can do it is surely as foolhardy as it is unnecessary. The result is a performance, rather than a character.

• • •

The biggest help from the gaslit sidelines comes from James Congdon as a passionate but perspiring suitor who can admire logic wherever he meets it, and from Kimetha Laurie as a seven-year-old parliamentarian with a ferocious gift for gaveling down opposition. Renne Jarrett, Nancy Devlin and Peggy Maurer are all attractive, too, and Mary Farrell sighs wistfully as a secret admirer of Mr. Wayne's.

All of Mr. Wayne's admirers will enjoy watching him clog a few steps across the rug in the direction of the bottle on the sideboard. But the play—thin as spun candy and just as old-fashioned—is another matter.

"THE LOUD RED PATRICK"

Comedy by John Boruff; suggested by the book of the same name by Ruth McKenney; staged by Robert Douglas; settings, costumes and lighting by Paul Morrison; presented by Richard W Krakeur, Mr. Douglas and David Wayne at the Ambassador Theatre, October 3, 1956. The cast:

Mrs. Gallup.....Mary Farrell
Rita Flannigan...Renne Jarrett
Rosalie Flannigan..Kimetha Laurie
Mary Flannigan...Nancy Devlin
Maggie Flannigan..Peggy Maurer
Patrick Flannigan.....
Arthur Kennedy
Mr. Finnegan.....David Wayne
Ralph Penrose...James Congdon
Richard.....James Karr

The New York Times
October 4, 1956

Theatre: Vintage 1912

By BROOKS ATKINSON

LET'S begin a new Broadway season by praising the actors. All the actors, in fact. For in the case of "The Loud Red Patrick," which re-opened the Ambassador last evening, that's about all there is to praise.

Arthur Kennedy plays a hot-tempered Irish-American of 1912, and David Wayne plays an unctuous Irish-American of the same vintage year. That's an attractive combination—Mr. Kennedy roaring and flexing his muscles; Mr. Wayne playing a seedy scrounger with the droop and wistfulness of a pensive pelican.

•

"The Loud Red Patrick" is a popular comedy that John Boruff has put together out of a book by Ruth McKenney. It is the harum-scarum story of an overbearing father of four daughters who is trying to prevent the oldest from marrying a young man he does not like. That is why Mr. Kennedy bellows and rages behind a set of scraggly whiskers. Mr. Wayne is a ne'er-do-well friend who acts as a comic chorus.

Since the comedy is set in 1912, it may be logical for Mr. Boruff to write in the style of 1912 and for Robert Douglas to direct the performance as though he were living in the Booth Tarkington era. But both approaches to the theatre make the pleasantries of "The Loud Red Patrick" seem uncomfortably contrived.

Even a popular comedy needs something real to go on. At the close of one act Mr. Kennedy has one good speech to make in praise of education, and he speaks it with a sincerity that is briefly moving. But most of the contrivances of "The Loud Red Patrick" seem cute, facile, glib and outmoded.

If Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Wayne are participating in this flight into the past because they think their parts are actable, they are well within their rights. The blustering, pig-headed father gives Mr. Kennedy a holiday from the serious parts he has had in recent seasons. There is some of the "Finian's Rainbow" leprechaun in Mr. Wayne's fooling—a leprechaun tarnished by the world, but still fanciful and ingratiating. While the comedy is racing desperately through its paces, it is consoling to watch a first-rate comedian build a part out of nothing but grace of movement, droll facial expressions and voice inflections.

•

Everybody in the cast is charming. As the oldest daughter, Peggy Maurer plays with spontaneity and bloom; and Nancy Devlin gives a winning performance as the next sister. James Congdon is bumptiously amusing as the nervous suitor; and Mary Farrell performs the ancient rites of the comic servant with agreeable good humor. As the littlest daughters, Renné Jarrett and Kimetha Laurie skim through their parts enchantingly.

As scene designer, Paul Morrison has provided the usual period living-room. As costume designer he has done better: he has recaptured some of the innocent charm of the past. The author has not been quite so fortunate. He has recaptured clichés from a kind of theatre that seems self-conscious today.

DAILY NEWS
October 4, 1956

'Loud Red Patrick' Charming; Kennedy and Wayne Delightful

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Apparently the American social revolution began in Cleveland in 1912 when an Irish immigrant named Flannigan decided that his four motherless young daughters had the rights to be human beings, to become educated and to vote. The details of this upheaval may be found in a charming comedy, "The Loud Red Patrick," which opened the new-play season last evening at the Ambassador Theatre.

John Boruff has made "Patrick" out of Ruth McKenney's reminiscences of her grandfather. It may be forgiven for becoming garrulous at times, for so much of it is delicious family comedy and quite a bit of it exhibits a precious touch of lunacy. Robert Douglas has directed a good company enjoyably, and the two leading comedians, Arthur Kennedy and David Wayne, show such relish for their roles that they are irresistible.

Kennedy, in a fine set of reddish whiskers, plays Patrick Flannigan, an opinionated and hearty fellow who has fought his way up to a fair prosperity as a house-builder. In the old country he knew poverty and tyranny, and is now determined that his daughters will never know what he knew.

Family Vote

Flannigan has revolutionary ideas, including a council system for running the family. The girls range in age from 10 to 17, and when a decision must be made they foregather for a discussion and a vote—each one getting a number of votes equal to the voter's age. Patrick has the most, naturally, with 45 — but if the girls stick together they can outvote him.

Patrick can usually avoid being balloted down with a judicious bribe like a box of candy, but he faces a loss on the only really important decision the family has had to make—whether Maggie, age 17, should go to Vassar as he wants or get married as she wants.

Into the household comes the happy character played by Wayne—a one-time small-time song-and-dance man, still dapper, who is in trouble over non-payment of alimony. He figures that if he quits his haberdashery job, leaves his room and moves in with his old friend Flannigan, he will be happily destitute and his ex-wife won't be able to get anything out of him.

Artful Portrait

Wayne's portrait of a tipsy Irish misogynist is utterly artful and like nothing else he has acted. He is always in motion and even his impish face is never in repose, and his voice is a delight and he discourses on the terrible follies of marriage. Women, he declares, are all right in their place—but their place isn't in the home.

One of the most amusing scenes in the comedy is a visit by the eldest daughter's suitor (James Congdon) to ask Patrick for the girl's hand in marriage. He tries to win this bluff and unfriendly man by telling an anecdote about a billy goat, and it is the most painfully unfunny story on record. Congdon, too, is an artful young comedian.

The rest of the company are good funmakers—Mary Farrell as the housekeeper, Renne Jarrett, Kimetha Laurie and Nancy Devlin as the youngest daughters and Peggy Maurer as an earnest 17-year-old. There is a fine bit of katzenjammer stuff in the third act when the girls declare war on their parent and torture him with hellish practical jokes. The comfortable setting and the 1912 costumes are by Paul Morrison.

Daily Mirror

October 4, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Loud Red Patrick' A Hilarious Comedy

• David Wayne, Arthur Kennedy star in heart-warming frolic.

"The Loud Red Patrick" rolled into the Ambassador Theatre Wednesday evening, and rocked the first-nighters with lusty laughs. Using a book by Ruth McKenney as a springboard, John Boruff has fashioned a heart-warming frolic about life in Cleveland back in 1912.

When Patrick Flannigan landed in the Midwest from Ireland, he fell in love with progress. He determined that all his daughters should have college educations. And he ruled his roost democratically, or so he claimed. The members of the family cast as many votes in the household council as they boasted years.

BUT SHREWD PATRICK was not above a little bribery of the smaller fry, a little chicanery, when things weren't going his way. Particularly when daughter Maggie wanted to forego Vassar in order to marry young Ralph Penrose, a gas magnate's son. The loud one was also irritated when Papa Penrose didn't want to go to the expense of substituting new-fangled electric bulbs for old-fashioned gas lights.

But that's all we're going to tell you about the domestic ructions in the Flannigan menage, for the chances are a lot of you are going to want to enjoy them first hand. That is, those of you who are looking for a human and hilarious, a blatantly unsophisticated, comedy click.

Arthur Kennedy plays the opinionated Patrick with fitting bluster. He is really something to see when his theories backfiré on him. And David Wayne has a chuckle-provoking field day as an ex-vaudeville ham in flight from an alimony-minded ex-wife. Since David is co-producing "The Loud Red Patrick" with Richard W. Krakeur and Robert Douglas, he's bent on giving the customers their money's worth.

Peggy Maurer is captivating as the determined Maggie Flannigan, **James Congdon** is excellent as her bashful suitor. And there are most pleasant contributions by Mary Farrell, Renne Jarrett, Kimetha Laurie and Nancy Devlin.

PAUL MORRISON HAS designed atmospheric scenery and costumes, while Douglas has staged the new laugh hit with his usual skill.

The Shuberts have re-decorated the Ambassador Theatre, recently reclaimed from television, in honor of its new tenant. It's now one of the handsomest houses on the Rialto, a fitting home for "Life With O'Father"—or, if you prefer, "The Loud Red Patrick."

Journal-American

October 4, 1956

Merry and Superbly Acted

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE NEW SEASON in the theatre got off the ground last night with the opening of something called "The Loud Red Patrick," at the Ambassador Theatre.

This is John Boruff's adaptation of the Ruth McKenney book of the same name, and it is one of those whimsical, homey-type segments from somebody's autobiography which usually fare better on paper than on the stage.

But it must be submitted here that due to the efforts of a truly superior cast the key characters meld into a semblance of form and proportion, and even the incidents involving a wacky household emerge with poignance and charm.

The single set is the living room in a middle-class home in Cleveland, circa 1912. Patrick Flannigan, a widower, has four daughters, aged eight to seventeen, and the play revolves around the old man's effort to prevent his eldest from marrying the son of a gas company tycoon.

Collateral Figures

There are some extraordinary collateral figures: a sodden ex-song-and-dance man who settles down to his amiable and philosophic existence in a cubby-hole beneath the front stairs; and a Mrs. Gallup, the long suffering housekeeper, who blossoms glamorously when she loses her spectacles and it is discovered that her bank balance is bountiful.

It takes time to evaluate and become attracted to the various displays in Miss McKenney's crazy crib, but once the introductions are complete the proceedings mount to a hilarious and rewarding finish.

Arthur Kennedy, the fierce head of the household, gives a brilliant and believeable delineation of a father fighting a losing battle to raise four girls under a "family council" system of democracy. David Wayne, the inebriate who moves in and becomes part of the domestic electorate, has a field day with his tarnished observations on the sanctity of home, marriage, and the general futility of life devoid of a bottle.

Steal Scenes

Renne Jarrett and Kimetha Laurie, two sprouts who play the youngest sisters, sustain the well-known tradition of stealing every scene in which they are allowed to speak above a whisper. Nancy Devlin, who is cast as the second-eldest is quietly capable, and Peggy Maurer, as the daughter who would renounce a career at Vassar to marry the utilities heir, is always engaging and competent.

James Congdon, in the role of the bewildered suitor, gives a consistently uncomfortable and hilarious performance, one of the high-lights of the evening.

Robert Douglas, the director, has kept the festivities flowing at a merry and pleasantly-unpretentious pace, and Paul Morrison has designed a believably hideous 1912 living room.

"The Loud Red Patrick" is all fluff and nonsense, but it's wonderfully well put together and acted, and it's my guess it'll be around for a long spell.

New York Post

October 4, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Comedy of a Rebellious Family

To describe it rather freely, "The Loud Red Patrick" is a sort of Irish-American vaudeville version of "Life With Father." The new comedy by John Boruff, which opened last night at the Ambassador Theater, is based on the book of the same name by Ruth McKenney, and, with Arthur Kennedy and David Wayne giving good roistering performances in the leading roles, it provides quite a bit of amusement in its amiable cartoon of family life in the Cleveland of 1912. But it also struck me as labored and mechanical in its maneuvers, and only too intermittently satisfying.

The father in this case adheres to the pattern by being a blustering but basically soft-hearted family tyrant who wins all the battles but loses the war. He departs from the custom, however, by being a man with a theoretical belief in liberty, who thinks he wants to teach his motherless daughters independence by letting them vote with him in family council on all domestic decisions. But he also wants to win every decision by bullying or by rigging the vote, and he is determined that his eldest child must go to Vassar and not marry rich young Ralph Penrose.

The Rebellion

The plot framework, of course, is concerned with the allied determination of the children to thwart him, and it certainly is giving away no secret to note that he hasn't a chance from the start. I thought the meetings of the family council had their entertaining moments, and the sight and sound of rebellion when the four girls revolted by breaking up the household routine noisily were agreeably amusing. The only trouble is that the play's festivity comes by fits and starts, and the mechanics of the comedy seem a little too obviously fabricated for complete comfort.

The most entertaining member of the domestic circle is an interloper named Finnegan, who moves in on the Flannigan family in an abortive scheme to avoid paying alimony. Since the role is played by Mr. Wayne with all of his customary charm and guile, the somewhat meddlesome gentleman is the life of the evening. Indeed, despite the interest of the family squabbles, "The Loud Red Patrick" is at its best when it becomes the vaudeville act of the comedy team of Flannigan and Finnegan, and, if the play is a success, it will be chiefly due to the work of David Wayne.

The Tyrant

This is not to deny that Mr. Kennedy, always an excellent actor, gives his customarily able performance in the title role of the game but baffled father. I think he is happier in a more serious part, and he has to labor manfully to simulate the bluster and the tyranny, but his valuable contribution to the play is that he gives the bewhiskered Patrick Flannigan a stalwart quality that makes his theoretical advocacy of freedom and education seem more than a pious fraud. The embattled parent thus becomes a fairly sympathetic figure even in his tyranny.

The other roles are much less important than those of the two thwarted males, but they are well-managed. Peggy Maurer, as the girl who wants to marry, and Nancy Devlin, Renne Jarrett and Kimetha Laurie, as her younger sisters, stage their rebellion engagingly, while James Congdon as the suitor and Mary Farrell as the family maid are likewise excellent. And Paul Morrison's setting captures the proper mood. But, although the team of Flannigan and Finnegan offers some good comic routines, "The Loud Red Patrick" ends as rather mild and scattered entertainment.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 4, 1956

Fun and Gavels For All the Family

By TOM DONNELLY.

Anyone for another heart-warming family comedy, complete with a 1912 parlor and a bundle of old-time ejaculations like: "Women lawyers! What next?????"?

"The Loud Red Patrick" (at the Ambassador) is just the thing for folks who simply cannot get enough of that creamy molasses taffy. The title character is a widower with four young daughters but, if playwright John Boruff has disremembered Mama, he hasn't forgotten to work in all the other staples, down to and including a Stutz Bearcat that roars mightily in the wings.

Patrick Flannigan, pink and bewhiskered, runs his family on strictly parliamentary lines. (Or, at any rate, he thinks he does. But we have seen stage daddies and their crafty little daughters before, haven't we?)

Each member has as many votes as he has years. What schemes and counter-schemes are developed before our very eyes, as Patrick, 45, bribes the junior members to come over on his side in exchange for a box of chocolate creams, and quaint, gray Mrs. Gallup, the befuddled housekeeper, is faced with the ghastly necessity of revealing her date of birth!

The larger shade of the drama is devoted to these family councils and, take it from me, you can find more tricks and excitement almost any afternoon in the U.S. Senate.

I run the risk of erring on the side of charity, but I won't maintain that "The Loud Red Patrick" is without its relieving moments. There is an attractive passage in the first act, wherein Father Flannigan explains that it is because of the tyrannous unlettered poverty he knew in Ireland that he dreams fiercely of seeing his girls through college. A brief wind of real feeling may be felt here, blowing through the comic cardboard house.

David Wayne, who plays a tipsy friend of the family, has a number of dire pronouncements to make on the married condition, and on the unfathomable peculiarities of women in general. He delivers these with a gaudy disdain that is altogether winning. In fact, Mr. Wayne cuts an agreeable figure from start to finish. He suggests a disillusioned chipmunk as he hops through the evening, and the interview he conducts with the awkward suitor of the elder Miss Flannigan is a model projection of the sympathetic horror experience knows at the sight of youth standing on the yawning brink of matrimony.

As the loud, Red Patrick, Arthur Kennedy has an abundance of synthetic routines to run through, but he manages them handily enough. James Congdon, the lovelorn youth with the Stutz Bearcat, might have stepped right out of one of Norman Rockwell's studies of a period juvenile undergoing severe social discomfort, and this is obviously the desired effect. Peggy Maurer, impersonating the young lady who prefers marriage at 17 to matriculation at Vassar, is attractive and accomplished, and Renne Jarrett, Kimetha Laurie and Nancy Devlin are appropriately high-spirited as the other Flannigan girls.

Mr. Boruff's play was "suggested by a book by Ruth McKenney." Not having read the original, I can't say whether any delicate nuances have been lost.

"Saint Joan"

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

September 12, 1956

Siobhan McKenna's Saint Joan Pure Shaw, Pure Irish and Fine

By JOHN CHAPMAN

One could not ask for a better play or performance at the beginning of a theatrical season than Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan" as it was presented last evening at the Phoenix Theatre. Here is the stage as it should always be but so often isn't: an admirable drama admirably acted.

We've been hearing of Siobhan McKenna's Joan for more than a year, ever since this Irish actress made a personal triumph in the Shaw piece in London. Last evening she scored another personal triumph on Second Avenue, where her devotees offered her great cheers at curtain-fall.

Unique Performance

It is, certainly, a most individual performance. It is intense, seemingly simple but really tricky, and vocally heroic—and it is all done in an astonishing Irish brogue which Miss McKenna did not speak when she made her first appearance here in "The Chalk Garden." As the Irishman Shaw's mouthpiece in the drama, she is within her rights and his, too— for Shaw was more on the side of the Irish than the French when he wrote this biting and dramatically effective political document.

The Phoenix Theatre's company is an excellent one, and Albert Marre's direction is hard-boiled and clear, as befits the play. There is fine work by such as Ian Keith, a man of splendid gentility in the role of the Archbishop; Earle Hyman, as Joan's warrior friend; Thayer David, as an Inquisitor who delivers Shaw's long lecture on heresy with both grace and incisiveness, and Kent Smith as the magificently cynical Earl of Warwick. Michael Wager plays the character part of the Dauphin as a character, which is absolutely the only way to play him.

Truly a Warrior Maid

There is little softness, either of spirit or voice, in Miss McKenna's Joan. Here is a warrior maid who will not relent, relax or weaken, even when she submits to signing a confession of the sins with which she has been accused. Here is a girl who even orders a west wind, rather than seeking it. Her piety is militant, and does not have the softness of the last Shaw Joan we had here, Katharine Cornell.

Shaw's "Saint Joan" is a durable, incisive and witty drama which is really a comedy—the ultimate ironic comedy about man's inability to think straight. In it, Joan is not the principal character. Shaw is, of course. Miss McKenna and the Phoenix Theatre have done as well by Shaw as the old boy could have reasonably wanted, and this production should be a must for anybody who has respect for the theatre as well as affection.

G. B. S.'s drama about the Maid of Orleans was figured to be the definitive and ultimate work on the subject for 30 years or so. I'm glad that Jean Anouilh decided to have another look at this strange girl and write "The Lark." He found something in her that Shaw missed—a girl.

"SAINT JOAN"

Play by George Bernard Shaw; staged by Albert Marre; scenery and lighting by Klaus Holm; costumes by Robert Fletcher; presented by T. Edward Hambleton and Norris Houghton at the Phoenix Theatre, September 11, 1956. The cast:

Robert de Baudricourt.....Dennis Patrick
Steward.....P. J. Kelly
Joan.....Siobhan McKenna
Bertrand de Paulengay.....Lee Richardson
Archbishop of Rheims.....Frederic Tozere
Duc de la Tremouille.....Chris Gampel
Court Page.....John Glennon
Giles de Rais.....Paul Sparer
Captain La Hire..Arch Johnson
The Dauphin....Michael Wager
Duchesse de la Tremouille....Janet Dowd
Dunois.....Earle Hyman
Dunois' Page....Ralph Williams
Earl of Warwick....Kent Smith
Chaplain de Stogumber.....Earl Montgomery
Peter Cauchon.....Ian Keith
Inquisitor.....Thayer David
de Courcelles....Richard Purdy
Brother Martin Ladvenu.....Dick Moore
An English Soldier...Peter Falk

New York Post

September 12, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Siobhan McKenna's Shavian Triumph

The enthusiasm of London, Dublin and Boston over Siobhan McKenna's Maid of Orleans wasn't exaggerated. I have seen the heroine of Shaw's superb "Saint Joan" played by a number of excellent actresses, but, with proper respect to all of them, it seems to me that not one has been quite so right for the role. The glow of inner fire, the peasant simplicity, the smouldering lyricism, the glint of humor, the instinct for command, the spiritual loneliness and the proud confidence are all present in Miss McKenna's portrayal, and her magic is deep and unforgettable.

The new presentation of Shaw's finest drama, which opened last night at the Phoenix Theater, is an admirable one in every way, and the quality of what can be called without a moment of hesitation a masterpiece comes through with inescapable force and magnificence. Happily, "Saint Joan" hasn't been done as merely a starring vehicle for an exceptional actress. But it is also true that Miss McKenna seems to give the play a new quality of incandescence, and that is because we have never seen the role portrayed with such deeply instinctive feeling for it.

To appreciate the spiritual triumph of Joan completely, it is necessary to believe in both the peasant and the saintly aspects of the girl, in her own belief in the actuality of her Voices, in her calm confidence in herself in the midst of defeat and disaster, and in her ability to impress her qualities of leadership and spiritual strength on even the skeptical and resentful men about her. I think Miss McKenna manages all of these things with remarkable simplicity and utter conviction, and the peasant girl who was warrior, saint and poet comes to complete life.

While Miss McKenna is the triumphant heroine of the evening, Shaw certainly doesn't lose his status as its hero. Without losing any of the sheer dramatic effectiveness of Joan's tragic tale or sacrificing its emotional appeal, the lofty intellectual power of the play remains its dominating aspect. Who but Shaw, for example, could state the case for Joan's oppressors, the Inquisitor, the Bishop and even the conniving Earl of Warwick, so reasonably and powerfully and, in the process, damn them so irrevocably for their blindness, arrogance and intolerance?

There used to be a widespread opinion that the epilogue to "Saint Joan" was unnecessary and redundant, that its sardonic Shavianisms were a kind of tasteless excrescence. I think it is clear by now that the comments on mankind's embarrassment at living sainthood are not only vital to what the play is saying but are highly effective theatrically. And how admirable many of the seemingly secondary phases of the work are! There are few more touching scenes in all drama than the shocked recantation of the English chaplain after Joan's death when he has seen what cruelty means.

Albert Marre's staging is skillfully conceived and maintained, and there are a number of excellent performances in the supporting roles. Particularly good, I thought, are Kent Smith's Warwick, Ian Keith's Cauchon, Michael Wager's Dauphin, Thayer David's Inquisitor, Earle Hyman's Dunois, Frederic Tozere's Archbishop of Rheims and Earl Montgomery's Chaplain de Stogumber. Since it is one of the finest plays in English dramatic literature, it is always a pleasure to see a good production of "Saint Joan." Miss McKenna's radiant performance makes it even more worth seeing.

Daily Mirror

September 12, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'St. Joan' Gets Season Off on the Right Foot

• Siobhan McKenna, playing the Maid of Domremy with brogue, dominates production.

The new theatrical season got away to an auspicious start at the Phoenix Tuesday evening, when T. Edward Hambleton and Norris Houghton presented Siobhan McKenna in a stirring production of G. B. Shaw's "Saint Joan." It was originally done this past Summer at the Cambridge (Mass.) Drama Festival, and is a credit to that group.

Miss McKenna, whom you may have seen in "The Chalk Garden" last season, has had notable successes as Joan in London, Dublin and Galway. Born in Belfast, she uses a thick Irish accent as the Maid of Domremy. Probably to indicate that Joan was from the country, and not one to use the more polished speech of the French court.

THIS PROVED a bit distracting for us at first, in contrast to the English and American spoken by other principals. But as the evening wore on, our ear became accustomed to it. And it was an easy matter to take, in view of the glow, the fire and the conviction that she brought to the inspired girl who was martyred after freeing much of France from the English.

As Shaw points out, Joan not only achieved sainthood but also put the idea of nationalism into the British and French. Her remarkable achievements spelled the passing of feudalism and the birth of relatively strong nations in Europe. Determined and dedicated, she served her people well, only to get on the nerves of some of the big shots toward the end.

Under Albert Marre's resourceful direction, with appropriate settings by Klaus Holm and costumes by Robert Fletcher, this "Saint Joan" has vitality, sharp wit and genuine emotional impact The original script has been cut a bit, but the essentials have all been kept. The result is fine theatre, indeed.

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MICHAEL WAGER as the petulant, but rather shrewd Dauphin; Earle Hyman as the capable Dunois, Earl Montgomery as an obtuse English chaplain, Ian Keith as the hapless Bishop of Beauvais, Thayer David as the Inquisitor, Frederic Tozere as the inflexible Archbishop of Rheims, Dennis Patrick, Lee Richardson. Dick Moore and Arch Johnson are excellent.

But we particularly liked Kent Smith's cynical Earl of Warwick. It is handsomely spoken, and beautifully etched. A true picture of a warrior, king-maker and ruthless politician. A man more interested in gaining his ends than in such niceties as immortal truth and compassionate justice.

But it is Miss McKenna who really dominates "Saint Joan." Without make-up, with the plain, scrubbed face of a simple country girl, with a barbarous hair-cut and in costumes that would appal the tastes of "Mister John," she is nevertheless a vivid and tremendously appealing figure.

Too often our seasons open with inconsequential fare. With bloodless charades, cleverly enough contrived. So it is wonderful to have the new semester launched by a play of distinction, acted to the hilt. If "Saint Joan, with Miss McKenna, is a prophecy of things to come, the Fabulous Invalid will be as healthy as a dollar backed by gold.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

September 12, 1956

Siobhan McKenna Plays Saint Joan

By TOM DONNELLY.

Siobhan McKenna has played Shaw's "Saint Joan" in the old country, "in her own Gaelic translation," according to a Phoenix theater program note. Last night Miss McKenna interpreted "Saint Joan" in the original Shavian, with a fine Gaelic overlay which spread through the Phoenix like fresh and welcome music. It was a rather lonely strain, since most of the other members of the company settled for a flat stock company sing-song.

No doubt about it, in most respects Miss McKenna is an ideal Saint Joan. When she comes bounding bare-footed into the first act she does not for an instant suggest an actress schooled in genteel classics, and intimately acquainted only with such rocks and pastures as may have been cunningly counterfeited by expensive set designers. Miss McKenna is Shaw's "thorough daughter of the soil." She is brisk, vigorous, and hardy, and it seems the most natural thing in the world that she should sweep aside the fretful objections of feudal lords and ecclesiastics, and take charge of an army and show the professionals how a siege is really raised, and push a Dauphin into a cathedral and see to it that a crown is placed upon his reluctant head.

Miss McKenna understands perfectly, and projects beautifully, all of Joan's genius as a manager of practical affairs, and all of her capacity for cutting through to the heart of an argument, which is one of the highest forms of wit. Later on, in the trial scene, she summons up nicely the pathos of exhaustion, and some of that glory which arises when a trapped creature is able, through an exercise of will, to escape from tormentors who would seem to hold all the cards.

Perhaps Miss McKenna misses what may be called for the sake of convenience Joan's exalted quality. Miss McKenna is never larger than life, and never quite as large as Shaw. For all Shaw may say about Joan as a girl who "could carry rationalism to its ultimate human test of suicide," the fact remains that "Saint Joan" is a remarkable modern achievement in playwriting precisely because it is at once an intellectual drama and a spiritual testament. The sharp worldly humor in it never cancels out the mystical suggestion. If Miss McKenna doesn't manage an ultimate interpretation of Saint Joan, the wonder is that she accomplishes so much that is vital and charming in a production that is constructed, from the ground up, of lead.

As directed by Albert Marre, the play is a series of starts and stops, with long dusty stretches in between. The battle is downhill all the way. No scene flows from the one before. Each begins laboriously from scratch, as the actors totter out and go through their paces with the sort of weary desperation that one might expect to find in a troupe saddled with the task of selling Ibsen to Wilmington, Del., on a rainy Saturday night.

Occassionally the more glittering Shavian lines make themselves felt, but only to the degree that they could if the management had had them printed on large white cards and paraded through the aisles by the ushers.

There is one honorable exception to the gloomy rule. Thayer David, a young actor who has previously specialized in Restoration fops, makes the Inquisitor an interesting study in brimstone and decrepitude.

The New York Times
September 12, 1956

Theatre: Siobhan McKenna as Joan

She Stars at Phoenix in Shaw's Play

By BROOKS ATKINSON

As the Maid in Shaw's "Saint Joan," which began the new Phoenix season last evening, Siobhan McKenna brings us a performance that has already been fervently admired in Dublin, London, Cambridge, Mass., and Philadelphia.

She is the vivid Irish actress who played here in "The Chalk Garden" last season. A tidy young lady with a broad face, alert eyes and a voluminous voice, she makes an immediate impression on the theatre, and for the last two or three years she has made a distinct impression on "Saint Joan."

On the peasant aspect of Joan, to be precise. For Miss McKenna concentrates on the hearty farm girl who has seen visions and who bullies her way to the Dauphin's court and the vasty fields of France by her rude vitality, naïve camaradarie, brashness and boyish stance.

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Doubtless this is the most vigorous performance Shaw's Joan has ever had. Miss McKenna fairly bursts into every scene, and usually at the top of her voice. She reads her lines with a sing-song rhythm that becomes rather hypnotic before the play is over. But the accent is Irish, which makes it particularly attractive to American ears, and the voice is extraordinarily powerful.

There is more to Shaw's Joan than the peasant girl. As the title proves, there is the saint. It was the spiritual mystery of Joan that attracted Shaw to her as the subject for his finest work. Miss McKenna does not bring much illumination to the spiritual aspects of this thoughtful, inquiring study in the realm of faith.

After Joan has set the Dauphin on his feet and electrified Duvois of Orleans to attack the English, Miss McKenna has just about finished her contribution to the part. The devout scene in the cathedral, the trial scene before the ecclesiastical court touch deeper things. But they seem to be outside the scope of Miss McKenna's peasant maid. They are strangely unmoving in a rather limited style of acting that does not really recognize the problems of grace.

At the Phoenix, which is now beginning its fourth season, Miss McKenna is fortunate in having a production superior to the one that took London by storm in 1955. The physical production is simple but thoroughly effective. Klaus Holm has set it attractively with drapes and props, and Robert Fletcher's costumes of court, church and battlefield are vigorously designed.

Under Albert Marre's direction the thought and weight of Shaw's drama are intelligibly expressed. Kent Smith is particularly eloquent as the Earl of Warwick. Mr. Smith has a light, lucid way with the guile of that worldly politician; he has style as well as an understanding of the issues involved.

As the Bishop of Beauvais, Ian Keith gives a supercilious performance that does not really blend with the play. But Thayer David's weary, scrupulous Inquisitor; Michael Wager's peevish Dauphin; Dennis Patrick's bewildered Baudricourt; Lee Richardson's passionate prosecutor; Earl Montgomery's thick-headed British chaplain; Earle Hyman's amiable Dunois and Dick Moore's grievous Brother Martin—all are pithy and stimulating pieces of acting.

Thanks to Miss McKenna's boldness and vitality, and to the playing of her colleagues, this is an interesting performance of a modern theatre classic. But there is still quite a lot of Shaw and a saint that are neither felt nor communicated in Miss McKenna's acting.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
September 12, 1956

THEATER

'Saint Joan'

By WALTER F. KERR

IF FAITH moves mountains, Siobhan McKenna's fierce faith in the peasant girl she is playing finally moved a whole range of them at the Phoenix last night.

Let me say at once that in this Cambridge Drama Festival production of Shaw's "Saint Joan" there are mountains that seriously need moving. The first of them is a strong tendency on the part of nearly every one in boots, cowls and scabbards to go in for the hearty, booming and fist-shaking costume swirling that is too frequently thought of as "historical" acting. There is a kind of rhythmic rigor, too, that infects the supporting company as it peers out from under those bowl-like haircuts. Speech after speech begins on its own sudden momentum, taking almost no impetus from the rhetorical pronouncement that has preceded it. The players, many of them exceedingly young, aren't always perfectly acquainted with one another.

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And there is a built-in hurdle to be got over in Miss McKenna's own hard-driving methods. When the actress first bursts upon the scene—with a duster wrapped about her head, her face moist from the farm labors she has been doing, and a countryside brogue rolling from her lips—the image of the swarthy, uneducated passionate peasant is absolute. This is at once a Joan who could wangle a horse out of an unbeliever and head for the wars with a swift rap on its flanks.

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The girl's forthrightness has been magnificently established. A skeptic has no sooner tossed her a playful question about this business of Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret talking to her than she has rapped out a plain, blunt, bafflingly simple "They do." As she tangles with the ineffectual fops and laconic prelates of the court, the tone—bold, headlong, with nearly every word equally accented—rips loose again.

Sometimes it is as flatly emphatic, and as startlingly effective, as before. But there are dangerous times, deep in the second act, when the recurring, full-throated, hammer-and-tongs pattern threatens to do itself in, to become ritualistic and even monotonous in its majestic insistence.

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Miss McKenna's ultimate triumph, however, is to go right on insisting, right on badgering and hammering and calling aloud, until she has forced you to share the ferocity of her vision. You become adjusted to the clamor because it has conviction behind it, and the third act of this virtually uncut "Saint Joan" is far and away the most compelling of all.

By the time she has reached the trial scene, Miss McKenna has drawn everything into her own orbit, has narrowed the panorama to a single and glistening spotlight, has fastened every eye in the theater onto the painfully furrowed brow, the twisted mouth, and the still flashing temperament that cannot help calling a fool a fool. This scene alone, I think, demands your presence at the Phoenix.

The actress is not wholly unsupported in her titanic effort to hoist a vast and complex structure steadily upward. The drained weariness, and the rigorous wisdom, of Ian Keith's Bishop Cauchon serves as striking balance to the star's ringing vocal power. Frederic Tozere's dry and incurably rational Archbishop of Rheims creates the same sort of illuminating contrast in the scenes at court. Kent Smith's Earl of Warwick is, in spite of its curious note of effeteness, a welcome island of caustic calm amid the thunderbolts, and Thayer Davis' rather restless reading of the Inquisitor is at least crisp and curt as it makes its troublesome points. Michael Wager's purposely pallid Dauphin—sans eyebrows and lips—avoids caricature and stirs up an ounce of sympathy now and then but misses the grotesque definition and rich dramatic color it has been given in riper hands. Earle Hyman's mellow Dunois is at its most effective early in the game, as the listless soldier idles on a river bank and taps out an abortive poem to the west wind.

When the wind changes, it is at Miss McKenna's literal command. In the end, you are swept along on it.